The Centre Congregational Church in Retrospect

Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.—Psalm 26:8.

We come now to the closing service in the observance of the centennial of our church organization, which also is approximately the centennial of our church building and of the society which until the recent consolidation and incorporation of the two bodies under the name Centre Congregational Church was our business organization.

We feel that the Master has been especially near to us in these past few days, and we have been greatly inspired and blessed. We rejoice in the wonderful heritage that is ours, but we will be remiss in our duty as a church if we do not let that heritage work through us toward the accomplishment of our mission. We rejoice also that we could have with us during these centennial services all our living former pastors, Rev. Mr. Martin, Rev. Mr. Lee, Rev. Mr. Miles and Rev. Mr. Houghton, who have had an important part in making our church history, also Rev. Frederick W. Greene of Middletown, Conn., who was born in Brattleboro, united with this church and went out from it to college and into the ministry. We would have been pleased to welcome Prof. Williston Walker, D. D., of Yale University, an honored son of Brattleboro, to whom this church owes a debt of gratitude for his wise counsel and assistance in the choice of some of our pastors, but a letter from Professor Walker wished us all success and expressed regret that he could not get away in season.

We rejoice that we still have in the parish descendants of some of the first families of the church, including the Holbrook, Goodhue, Sikes and Thompson families. One of our church members, Miss Lelia Elizabeth Thompson, is a lineal descendant, four generations removed, from one of the charter members, Elizabeth Edwards, wife of Uriel Sikes. It was peculiarly fitting that as a part of this memorial occasion roses were placed on the mounds of our earliest members, including our first minister, in the cemetery on Prospect Hill. We are pleased that so many former residents have found it convenient to return this week to their old church home.

You have heard emphasized in a delightful way, since this observance began, the spiritual side of our church life of the past century. We now take up largely the material side as shown principally by the records, and you will please realize that it is no easy task to crowd the record of 100 years' work into about half that number of minutes.

Before this church was organized things were in a lax condition ecclesiastically in the West Brattleboro church, from which this church sprang, so when it was decided to have a church here it was thought the society would be more orthodox than the members coming from the old church, and the society therefore was given precedence in taking action in calling a pastor. At the installation of Dr. Martin, who is here today, President Timothy Dwight, D. D., of Yale, who was moderator, called attention to the irregularity. Governor Holbrook, in his impressive way, said it “had been the custom of the fathers.” Rev. Dr. C. H. Merrill of St. Johnsbury, who was scribe, ventured to inform the council of the tradition that gave a reason for the irregularity, and it seemed to satisfy President Dwight.

The earliest records in the clerk's books of records of this church are four pages in the handwriting of its first minister, Rev. William Wells. They bring the record down to July 7, 1816. Under the heading, “A short account of the first establishment of the Congrega-

tional society, at the village of Brattleboro',” he wrote as follows:

“The Revd. Mr. Reeve [Abner Reeve] was the first minister in this town. He came here in the year 1770, preaching alternately in Guilford and Brattleboro', the first three years. After that his ministerial labours were confined to Brattleboro'.

“Here he continued till the year 1794, when he was obliged to decline preaching, on account of age and infirmities. He died in the year 1798, aged 90.

“Before there was any meeting house in this town, there had used to be occasional preaching at Dummer, then a fort on the Connecticut river.

“The first meeting-house in this town stood near the grave yard, on which is still called the meeting-house hill.

“The shell of the present meeting-house in the middle of the town was erected in the year 1785 and was fitted up something more than 20 years ago [meaning a West Brattleboro church, begun by vote of the town in 1785, but not completed until about ten years later].

“On the Revd. Mr. Reeve declining preaching, the Revd. Wm. Wells succeeded him, a native of England. He was settled as a dissenting minister at Broomsgrove in Worcestershire, and continued there twenty-three years. He landed with his family in Boston June 13th, 1793, and came into this town in March, 1794, to settle on a farm. He was no sooner arrived here than he was desired to preach, and continued as the minister of the Congregational society 20 years; being chosen annually the minister of the parish during the whole of that period, always by large majorities, and often without a dissenting voice. During the 20 years of his ministry the society continued in a very peaceful state, was very much enlarged, and a considerable number were added to the church.

“In the latter end of March, 1814, Mr. Wells gave up his pastoral charge, the care of the whole town being too much fatigue for his advanced years and infirm health.

“From the first building of the present school-house

in the village there were lectures preached there, on Lord's-day evenings, by the Revd. Wm. Wells, generally as often as twice, and sometimes three times in the month. But the school-house was not sufficiently large to contain the people who were desirous of attending publick worship there. There had been a talk for many years amongst the people of the village of building a new meeting-house there, that themselves and families might be better accommodated for the publick worship of Almighty God.

"Their intention was not to divide the parish, but only to have such a portion of the publick services as their numbers and their ministerial tax might entitle them to.

"To this great objections were made by the people in the middle and western parts of the town. They said: 'You may build your meeting-house if you please, but we will have nothing to do with it.'

"Finding the Revd. Wm. Wells had given up the care of the whole parish, and that his health was improving, the people of the village, with some others, determined upon building a new place of worship, and desired Mr. Wells to begin immediately to preach to them as a separate society. This he did on the first Sabbath in April, 1814, the new meeting [house] not being ready to assemble in generally till Decr. 1815.

"The expense of building the new place and finishing it amounted to between four and five thousand dollars, which sum was raised with the utmost cheerfulness.

"Mr. Eli Sergeant, Mr. Fran^{s}. Goodhue and Lem^{l}. Whitney, Esq^{r}. were chosen a committee for inspecting and directing the building and finishing the new place; which business they performed to general satisfaction. Lem^{l}. Whitney, Esq^{r}., spent a great deal of time and exerted a great deal of well directed skill and taste in this important affair.

"The clock was a gift from Ebenezer Hunt, Esq^{r}., of Northampton. The bell was presented to the society by Arad Hunt and John Holbrook, Esq^{r}. The communion plate, the christening basin and the dressing

the pulpit was a present from the ladies, and the Bible, with the Psalm and hymn book, for the use of the pulpit, were given by young men belonging to the society.

“On the 5th of July, 1816, some neighbouring ministers were called upon to assist in forming a church, particularly Mr. Wood of Chesterfield, Mr. Pratt of Westmoreland, and Mr. Howe of Surry. The latter preached and Mr. John Holbrook was appointed deacon of the church.

“The first communion in the new place was on the 7th of July, 1816. A list of the old members, and also of those that have been added since the church was formed, will be given in its proper place.” This ends the narrative by Rev. Mr. Wells.

On July 5, 1816, the date when this church organization was formed, fourteen members withdrew from the mother church in West Brattleboro and joined the new church, forming our charter membership list. They were: John Holbrook; Mrs. John Holbrook, who was Sarah Knowlton; Mrs. William Fessenden, who was Patty Holbrook; Mrs. Uriel Sikes, who was Elizabeth Edwards; Sarah Barber; Susanna Dickinson; Mrs. Julia (Edwards) Phillips; Mrs. Laura (Whitney) Clark; Jane Wells; Ebenezer Wells; Mrs. Ebenezer Wells, who was Mary Chester; Mary Ann Wells; Hannah Wells; and Anna Gill.

Before the church was built meetings were called by posting notices in the village schoolhouse. Meetings were held in the schoolhouse, in private residences, and sometimes in Uriel Sikes's hotel. On August 13, 1818, the following vote was passed: “Voted, to grant leave to School District No. 2 to move the present School House & out buildings on or near the northwest corner of the Meetinghouse common and to erect such additional buildings for the use of Schools as the District may deem expedient.” Later a movement was started to rescind the vote, but it was not successful. The schoolhouse which stood there a number of years was what is now the Chase Street schoolhouse. On March 9, 1835, it was “voted to order the clerk to notify the

school district either to take off their school house on said society's common or pay a ground rent for the same." Five years earlier an article relative to permitting a schoolhouse to be erected on the east side of the common was dismissed.

From July 7, 1816, the date when Rev. Mr. Wells's record of our church history stops, the narrative is taken up by Asa Green, the first clerk of record, who covers the history from the dedication of the meeting-house the following month, August 22, 1816, until October 26, 1818, and then says: "The further history of the church and society will be continued in the several votes of the church, interspersed with such remarkable events as the clerk of the church shall think ought to be handed down for the benefit of succeeding ages and members of the church, both for example and reproof."

It is apparent from this that the proceedings for a little more than two years after the meeting-house was dedicated were not recorded in a church book, but Mr. Green gives in narrative form something of what took place during that time. He writes:

"On the 22d of August, 1816, the new meeting house at the village was solemnly dedicated to the publick service of Almighty God. The Rev. William Wells made the dedicatory prayer. The Rev. Samuel Willard of Deerfield, Mass., preached from Hab. II, 20th, 'The Lord is in his holy temple.' The Rev. Mr. Pratt made the concluding prayer. The sermon was printed, the singing was appropriate to the occasion. Eleven or twelve ministers were present, and a vast concourse of people, who seemed much interested in the services of the day.

"The Rev. William Wells continued to be hired as a preacher yearly in the month of April until the year 1818, at which time he left the people to visit his native land to be absent at least one year, and when expostulated with on account of leaving the people by the deacon of the church he said 'My mind is made up and you must take care of yourselves,' and accordingly the church and society considered that there was no farther

relationship as pastor and people existing between Mr. Wells and them and that it was time for them to take ‘care of themselves.’

“Mr. Wells started for England aged 76. The Rev. Mr. Wollege hearing that the church was destitute he offered his services for a few Sabbaths, during which time they heard of a young man by the name of Jonathan McGee, who was every way qualified for a gospel minister, and unto him they applied to supply the desk for a few Sabbaths, which he commenced on the 21st day of June, 1818, and was so universally liked that it might with truth be said that none was his enemies only such as was enemies of the gospel. His sentiments were truly orthodox on such as is contained in the gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. His collegiate studies was at Williams Colledge, Mass., and his theological studies at that Highly and Justly Inestimable Institution at Andover, Mass.

“Suffice it to say that he was so well liked that on the 26th of October, 1818, the church held a meeting for to take into consideration the expediency of giving Mr. McGee a call to settle over them as their spiritual guide, the society having voted by an almost unanimous vote to settle him should the church agree, which the church did by a vote of 19 to one, Lemuel Whitney only voting against the call.”

In a note the clerk says: “It was supposed that the only objection that Mr. Whitney had against the settlement of Mr. McGee was because he was not sufficiently consulted by the church and society and not for any dislike he had or could have to Mr. McGee.”

While waiting to hear from Mr. McGee the church met, December 1, and adopted some rules “for the better government of the church.” One was “that visiting members of regular standing in other churches have one year allowed them from the time of their first communion with this church to produce a certificate of their good standing in the church to which they belong, after which time they shall not be allowed the privilege of

communion until they produce a certificate of their good standing and be received by a vote of the church."

At the same time it was voted to meet once every quarter, beginning the first Tuesday in January, next, at the schoolhouse at 6 o'clock p.m.

A favorable reply from Mr. McGee having been received, pastors and delegates, pursuant to letters missive, assembled at the home of John R. Blake, January 12, 1819, examined the candidate, voted to ordain him, assigned the parts and adjourned to 11 o'clock next day at the meeting-house, where the ordination took place.

The clerk's record of that day begins as follows: "The ordination day was very pleasant and although the middle of January it was as warm and as mild as October, there being no snow on the ground." Continuing, he writes: "About thirty ministers were present and many hundreds of people to witness the ordination, this being the first ordination that ever was performed in the town of Brattleboro, though there had been stated preaching in it for more than fifty years. All things were conducted with the greatest decency and order. And here it will not be improper," the clerk adds, "to introduce an extract of a letter from the Rev. William Wells on his being informed that Mr. McGee was ordained over the people that he formerly had had the charge, though he himself never was ordained or installed over them, but only hired, and that annually." In his letter Mr. Wells wrote: "I not only cheerfully acquiesce, but also cordially approve of what you have done." Rev. Mr. Wells died in this village in December, 1827, at the age of eighty-three years, and was buried in the north part of Prospect Hill cemetery. During his pastorate seventy-eight were added to the church by profession.

From the date of the ordination of Rev. Mr. McGee, January 13, 1819, until December 21, 1823, a period of about five years, the record of the meetings contains little of importance. Then follows a period of eight years of which no record whatever is contained in the church book, although none of the pages are missing.

When the society extended a call to Rev. Mr. McGee it promised him “the use or rent of a decent parsonage (house, garden, etc.)” as soon as he might need it. At a meeting January 22, 1823, it was voted to open a subscription for procuring or building a parsonage, and a letter from Sally Holbrook, wife of Deacon John Holbrook, was read, in which she said that at an early day the ladies of the society, anticipating the time when they would be called upon for a house for the minister, formed themselves into a society, called the Female Fund Society, for that purpose. By their industry and savings they had accumulated $400, “which is before you,” she wrote. She offered to furnish, “in behalf of the Female Fund Society, a plat of ground of not less than one acre (if it be obtained within 160 rods of the meeting-house, at a fair price) for the purpose of placing the buildings thereon.” Mrs. Holbrook named as conditions that it should be used for the purpose of a parsonage for the society forever and that it should never be diverted in use from the support of “the free, independent Congregational order,” in manner and form as the parish was then organized.

The offer was accepted, subscriptions of about $800 were added to the fund of $400, the site with aqueduct water cost $180, and funds from other sources brought the total up to $1,530, and the parsonage was erected on the site of the present parsonage on the east side of the highway east of the common. The Female Fund society was not continued after the parsonage was built.

In the same meeting when Mrs. Holbrook's offer was accepted her husband offered $400 on condition that the society would raise a like amount, the whole to accumulate interest for three years, after which the interest on the whole should be applied toward the support of the gospel. This offer likewise was accepted and thus began our permanent fund.

Let us go back now to the beginning of the ecclesiastical society and the erection of the first house of worship. The parish record begins April 20, 1814, the same month that Rev. William Wells confined his labors

to this village. “A number of inhabitants of Brattleboro, having assembled at the public house of Salem Sumner on the 20th of April, 1814, for the purpose of making arrangements for the erection of a House of Public Worship,” the record reads, they organized by appointing Peleg Kingsley moderator and Ezra Clark clerk. It was voted (1st) “That the persons who compose this meeting, and others who may become associates, form ourselves into a Society by the name of the Brattleborough Village Meetinghouse Society, for the purpose of purchasing Land and erecting thereon a House of Public Worship for the convenience of the inhabitants of said Brattleboro and the adjacent Towns”; voted (2d) “That a Committee be chosen consisting of three persons to purchase Land of Grindal R. Ellis situate at the north end of the village on the plain lying between the roads leading from said village to Newfane & Putney agreeable to a survey made by Henry Clark.” The committee, Francis Goodhue, Lemuel Whitney and Eli Sargeant, was authorized to award the contract for erecting the church building, to raise the money by subscription not to exceed $3,250 and to sell the pews or slips within 90 days after its completion, by auction.

Meetings continued to be held, usually in the schoolhouse at 3 o'clock p.m. The tenth meeting was adjourned to the house of Erastus Dickinson and it was there voted, April 8, 1815, to buy additional land of Mr. Ellis for $160 and to authorize the committee to expend on the meeting-house the whole amount of the money which might be collected from the subscription.

It is stated in Burnham's history of Brattleboro that “Grindal R. Ellis, Esq., deeded to the society the land now known as the Village Common, on condition that the new edifice be located there. The new society acted in conformity with said conditions in 1815, but in 1842 lost all claim to the land by removing the house and neglecting to fence the grounds.” A subsequent historian of the church repeated those statements in almost the same words. I am unable to find any proof that

NEAR STOOD THE FIRST BUILDING
OF THE CENTRE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
ERECTED IN 1815
MOVED TO ITS PRESENT SITE 1842
THIS MARKER WAS PLACED JULY 9, 1916

Unveiling of the Marker

the statements are correct. I have examined the deed in the town clerk's office and find that on July 10, 1815, three months after it was voted to buy additional land, Mr. Ellis deeded to the society's committee, for a consideration of $300, approximately four acres of land between the road to Putney and the road to Newfane, bordering on each, and that the deed contains no condition or restriction whatsoever. I find no mention or acknowledgment of any gift of land in the society records for a site for the meeting-house, and Rev. Mr. Wells does not mention the subject in his history of the beginnings of the church. Neither was any gift made to the society in Mr. Ellis's will, which I have read. No record ever has been found of any transfer of the land by the society, so that on the town books the title still remains in the society, but, of course, after all these years of occupation of the land by the town without objection, the society could not maintain an action to recover the use of it. The society had permitted the use of the land as a common while the church stood there and was content to do so after its removal.

There were forty-two names on the subscription paper by which funds for the building were raised, at the time it was recorded in the society's book, and the subscriptions foot up $3,750. At the head of the list stand the names of Peleg Kingsley, Francis Goodhue (who was one of the building committee) and William Fessenden with contributions of $400 each. Two gave $200 each, one gave $150, one $140, seven $100 each, and no one gave less than $10. The building was not completed until 1815 and not actually dedicated until August 22, 1816, or about seven weeks after the formal organization of the church on July 5.

On August 27, 1818, four years after the Brattleboro Village Meeting-house Society was organized, James Elliot, Esq., the moderator, expressed the belief that the society had never been legally associated for the purposes of hiring or settling a minister, and that any proceedings under the warrant were informal. The members took that view and dissolved the meeting, but

immediately in a formal way voted to associate themselves under the name of the Brattleboro East Society, for the support of the gospel, as provided by a legislative Act of October 26, 1798. In a few days by-laws were adopted and matters went along in a legal way. The Secretary of State informs me that there is in his office no record of the incorporation of the Brattleboro East Society. “This,” he says, “probably is owing to the fact that prior to 1853 corporations formed under the general law were not required to cause a record to be made in this office.”

The location of the meeting-house, in the recollection of some of our aged members, was some distance west of the middle of what is now the village common, about opposite the present driveway on the Lyman E. Holden premises, and faced south. It was painted white, the steeple was much shorter than now and rose from the roof, from a cubical base, above the base being a section with eight sides and over this a round-top tower. The building had a row of pillars in front.

At a meeting of the society on September 30, 1816, these two entries are made: “Voted, that the thanks of the Society through their clerk be made to Mr. John Holbrook and to Gen. Arad Hunt for their liberal donation of a bell to the society,” and “Voted that the thanks of the society be made through their clerk to Mr. Ebenezer Hunt, Jr., of Northampton for the donation of a clock.”

The bell was hung in the steeple and did service there until 1831, when it cracked, and at the society meeting of March 14 of that year it was voted “that the standing committee enquire into the expediency of either selling, exchanging or recasting the bell to the meeting-house.” This year when the bell cracked was the same year that there came a division in the church, on account of the strict doctrines of Rev. Mr. McGee, and the Unitarian society was formed. The clock was tried out six months, and on April 8, 1817, we find the society voting “that the committee be instructed to make such alteration in the gear of the meeting-house clock

as to cause it to run seven days without winding up, and that they have discretionary power to make such alterations and improvements in the running gear of the clock as they may deem expedient."

In 1832 it was decided to have both a new bell and a new clock, and we find in the record of the meeting of March 26, 1832, this entry: "Also voted the thanks of this society be presented to John Holbrook, Esq., Mr. Joseph Fessenden & Mr. John C. Holbrook for their liberal donations & assistance in procuring a new Bell & Clock for this Society & the same vote be placed on the records." A record of the subscribers for the bell and clock is contained in a book which was kept by the trustees distinct from the clerk's books. The subscriptions by John Holbrook and Joseph Fessenden exceeded those of other members, but John C. Holbrook, who had been dismissed to the Bowdoin Street Church in Boston two years earlier, was especially thanked because of his contribution in affection for his native parish. He was a son of John Holbrook and brother of the late ex-Gov. Frederick Holbrook. George Holbrook of Medbury, Mass., a cousin of John Holbrook, cast bells and made clocks, and he sent a bell here for trial, and while it was a deep, mellow tone, it was not entirely satisfactory and was replaced by one from a Troy, N. Y., foundry. The clock, which is the one now in use, was bought the same year of George Holbrook, and it bears his name. Originally it had but one face, but when the church was moved to its present site ten years later, in 1842, the two other faces were added. The subscriptions for both bell and clock totalled $615.52, to which was added an allowance of $177 for the old bell and $30 for the old clock, so that the total cost of both was $822.52. Many have thought that this was the last bell bought by the society, but it was not. The records show that in 1875 a much larger bell was bought at a cost of $1,430.37, the old bell being turned in at $423.13, subscriptions amounting to $367, and the balance, $640.24, standing as a debt.

The frame of the old church was raised after the

custom of those times, the sides being constructed on the ground and then raised into position by means of pike-poles and fastened with wooden pins. The old timbers were hewn by hand and the adz marks are plainly visible today. The timbers reveal a high class of workmanship, and the men who fashioned them certainly were workmen who needed “not to be ashamed.”

There were many more windows in the old building than the frame now contains, which flooded the church with light. There were no blinds, and the windows were equipped with inexpensive curtains. The bell swung in plain sight at first and later was enclosed with blinds. There was a lightning rod on the roof, and the weathervane and letters which crown our present spire adorned the old steeple. There was a cellar under the meeting-house, which served as a storehouse for the village hearse, two cannon said to have been captured from Burgoyne, and for a time a sulky owned by Chief Judge Royall Tyler of the Vermont Supreme Court. That it became cluttered is apparent from the vote of March 14, 1825, when the committee was instructed to put the cellar in good order and that for the ensuing year they either lease it to some person or charge for storage of whatever was put into it.

In the first arrangement of pews there was an aisle down the center, a row of pews on either side, then more aisles, making three aisles in all, and then the outside rows of pews attached to the walls, making four rows of pews, with doors at each end except the wall pews. There were pews on either side of the pulpit, running at right angles with the others. The gallery arrangement was somewhat as at present, with two rows of pews. A row with backs against the wall ran the entire length of the meeting-house on either side. The front rows were like the back ones except that at the south end, over the entrance, they were circular and three deep. These were occupied by the choir.

The interior painting was white, except for the dark tops of the pews and red frescoing in imitation of draperies on the wall. The pulpit was about half as

high as the room and was supported by four pillars, under which was a recess which the minister occupied at communion. On one side of the recess was a door opening upon the pulpit stairs, while a door on the other side opened into a closet where were kept the sacramental elements and furniture. Each owner of a slip, which was the common name for pew, was enjoined by vote of the society not to meddle with the property in another's slip, and as the equipment of each slip was left to the owner, even to cushion and carpet, the furnishings were very diversified.

In 1833 the need for more pew room led Deacon John Holbrook to state that when the meeting-house was built its projectors committed many errors in forming it to meet the wants of the few people then in the village, its extreme height not corresponding with its length. It was then voted to give up the broad aisle, thereby increasing the length of the pews in the middle rows.

At first there was no provision for heating the church, but before the day of the footstove had passed away, this church, abreast of the times, put in two iron stoves for heating purposes in winter. The stovepipes ran along under the galleries as far as the side aisles went and then went out through tin-lined apertures in the windows. The arrangement was not wholly satisfactory, if we may judge from a resolution introduced by John Holbrook and adopted at the meeting of March 11, 1833, whereby a committee was appointed to take steps “to warm the meeting-house from the basement room, and get the present stove and pipe, dust, smoke and eyesores out of sight.” Apparently nothing came of the plan, for we note the payment two years later of a small balance on a new stove. The smoke nuisance continued, however, and was a subject of official attention as late as 1852, some years after a furnace had been installed.

Ten members of this church withdrew early in 1831 and formed the Unitarian Congregational Society. The following year, on May 8, the following rule was

adopted: “This church will not give a letter of recommendation to any of its members to join any particular church.” In 1835 there were eleven more withdrawals to unite with the Unitarian church, including five of the charter members.

It seemed expedient in 1832 for the society to make certain restrictions as to the use of its edifice along certain lines, and we find it, on March 26, laying down the law as follows: “This meeting house was dedicated to the Most High; in which the Divine service or the religious worship of the East Society of Brattleboro is to be performed. It is under their control, and is for their use only, by whom and for whom it was built. It is proper that the minister of the parish should have the charge and regulation of the pulpit, agreeable to the proper custom of our fathers, of the Congregational order, and other denominations since the first settlement of our country. For the peace, comfort and happiness of this society, therefore, it is declared by them that no irregular or unchristian preachers shall be admitted into the pulpit, no exhibitions, tragedies, plays or farces shall disgrace the temple, no military bands or training companies of men with their firearms and train of dirt and dust, tarnishing the pews, disorganizing the cushions and books, shall be permitted to enter this house. But on great or public days, if orations are necessary to be delivered here, leave must first be had of the board of trustees of the society, under whose care and superintendence it shall be at all times.”

The music in the old days was rendered without pay, for the most part. The choir, seated in the south end gallery opposite the minister, sometimes numbered more than thirty, and the singers and instrumentalists are said to have been skilled in execution in the best sense of the term. They were well equipped to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Besides the singers there were two violins, a bass viol, a violoncello and two flutes. The late ex-Gov. Frederick Holbrook, who in his active manhood for years was the director of the music, in a parish meeting and praise service in the chapel Friday

evening, May 26, 1899, said in his recollections: “As a boy, naturally musically inclined, to me the old fugue tunes, universally in use then, made a considerable impression. The congregation quite generally joined in singing them in their pews to the hymns announced. It would be a curious spectacle now to look over a worshipping congregation and observe as one did in those olden times nearly everyone in the pews holding up hymn books in one hand and quite plainly beating time with the other hand, for each singer in those days beat the time also, which was usually a sort of measured, stately movement, more like a stately march of even trend, rather than the rapid and often too hurried movement for a congregation to join in of the present day.”

The society recognized the right of all persons to affiliate themselves with any society they chose, yet it was thought best in 1832 to define the limits of this parish, so it was voted that the parish extend three miles north, three miles south, one and one-half miles east and one and one-half miles west of the meeting-house, and it was voted at the same time that after each annual meeting the trustees should invite all young men of age and all newcomers in the parish to come to this church and enjoy the gospel privileges.

On Friday evening, December 20, 1833, the church for the first time held its weekly meeting in a chapel on Elliot Street, which had been built by individuals of the evangelical society for the convenience of the society, the church building still being on the common. The chapel stood on the south side of Elliot Street, where Emerson & Son's furniture store now stands. It was moved in 1913 to the rear of the north watercure building on Elliot Street, and is now used for tenement purposes. On the Friday evening above mentioned this chapel was dedicated, the service opening with prayer by Joseph Fessenden. The pastor, Rev. Jonathan McGee, read scripture and offered prayer and gave a history of the church from its organization to that time.

Two weeks later Joseph Fessenden, John C. Holbrook and John L. Dickerman were appointed a committee to

look up promising indigent young men and encourage them in their efforts to obtain an education, “particularly those who are members of this church,” which indicates that the attitude of the Centre Church was in alignment with that which Congregationalists always have taken with respect to matters educational. At a later period, in 1854, it was voted to raise $1,000 to establish three scholarships in Middlebury College.

The church took a definite stand on the matter of the use of intoxicants at its meeting of January 31, 1834. The clerk's entry reads: “This evening being the time appointed for the church to act on the subject of temperance, it was discussed with much ability by several members. There was but one opinion as to the utility of the measure, but different views as to adopting the pledge. It was, however, adopted in the words following, viz.: ‘Resolved, that the traffic in, and use of ardent spirit as a drink being immoral, their practice is inconsistent with the Christian profession, and with good standing in this church, and their abandonment shall henceforth be an invariable rule of admission to membership in this church.’ Passed almost unanimously, by 3 dissenting votes.”

In these early years much time was taken up at the church meetings in the matter of discipline. If a member's conduct was not in accord with some other member's conception of what it should be it was the custom to enter a complaint at a church meeting, either verbal or written, and the pastor would be directed to address a letter of admonition, or a committee would be appointed to wait upon the transgressor and to report to the church the result of the interview in order that a course of action might be formulated. If the committee's report was favorable and the erring one manifested a spirit of sufficient penitence the complaint, if written, would be torn up. Sometimes, however, the complaint and investigation led to excommunication. Confessions occasionally were received and placed on file, and now and then a person complained of would be called upon in church meeting to answer charges. Sometimes they

would be suspended temporarily and then restored to full communion.

The record of one meeting reads that “After some remarks by different members of the church regarding those members who have absented themselves from the church and communion for a year past or longer it was proposed to postpone the subject until next Friday evening, and then to adopt some measures which might be thought most judicious in regard to those individual members.” At the next meeting a committee was appointed “to wait on those members who have absented themselves from the church communion, and learn from them their motives for thus doing.” It does not appear what measures finally were adopted with reference to these absentees.

Complaint was entered against one person because he “has for years lived in the entire neglect of public worship and other Christian duties.” Of another it is written that she “neglects her covenant obligations and public worship with this church.” Of another it was stated that she “does not attend any Christian duties except now and then with the Universalists.” All three were excommunicated. At eleven meetings there was considered the case of a male member who, according to a complaint, “has been for some time in the habitual use of ardent spirit and guilty of the sin of intemperance.” At the tenth meeting, after repeated admonitions, the case was continued an indefinite time with the understanding that the first time he was known to be intoxicated the church would proceed to excommunication. Alas, within two weeks the brother erred again and the church proceeded to do its solemn duty.

The year 1834 marked the close of the pastorate of Rev. Jonathan McGee, not quite sixteen years after his ordination. He was a man of no ordinary talents. Deacon John Holbrook, the first deacon of this church, wrote of him that he was “very modest and unassuming, of as pure principles and spotless character as walks among men; and was a faithful minister of the gospel.” Large additions were made to the church

membership during his pastorate. In the fall of 1832 revival services were held, in which the principal speaker was a Mr. Boyle, a young evangelist from New York State. He was a man of good intentions, but his methods and what have been referred to as his “exciting manner and use of wild airs” started a smouldering fire which burned for a considerable time and finally broke out in the summer of 1834 in the form of a letter addressed by twenty members of the church to the pastor asking him to consider whether the cause of religion in this place would not be promoted by a dissolution of the connection existing between them as pastor and people.

The matter came before a church meeting August 1 and a resolution was introduced that it would not be for the best good of the church and the cause of religion to have the pastoral relations dissolved. It was a very stormy meeting and some unbecoming remarks were made. The vote on the resolution stood 29 yea and 29 nay, which meant that the pastor might stay, but naturally he did not care to remain, under the circumstances, and asked to be dismissed by an ecclesiastical council, which was done September 10, but the council spoke in terms of highest commendation of Rev. Mr. McGee and urged the churches to “discountenance the wild evangelism of the times, which is breaking up the foundations of many generations.”

The council suggested that the church and society remunerate Rev. Mr. McGee “for some of the pecuniary lapses to which he is subjected by a removal, and in consideration of his having spent the prime of his strength in their service,” and it is recorded in the Brattleboro East Society's book that although Rev. Mr. McGee left four months before his year was up he was paid the four months' salary, $166.66. Individuals contributed $166.50 more, making his total gift $333.16. During his ministry the additions to the church membership were 281. He died in Nashua, N. H., August 3, 1876, at the age of eighty-seven years.

Immediately after Rev. Mr. McGee's dismissal the

pulpit was occupied by the minister who succeeded to the pastorate, Rev. Dr. Charles Walker, who was called October 24, after preaching three Sundays. Rev. Mr. Walker had been preaching in Boston before being asked to supply here, and before that he was pastor of the church in Rutland, Vt. He was the father of the late Rev. Dr. George Leon Walker, who later became minister of this people, and was grandfather of Prof. Williston Walker of Yale. He was installed January 1, 1835. Rev. Mr. Smith of Chesterfield, N. H., supplied until the pastorate began.

It was while Rev. Mr. Walker was pastor that the church was removed to its present site in 1842, and here begins a new era in our church history. A new book of records begins at this time, the first half of which is made up of printed deeds of the pews from that time forward, some of them filled out and some in blank. One of the early deeds, dated February 22, 1816, is in the possession of Myron F. Dutton of Dummerston. It shows that the committee of the Brattleboro Village Meetinghouse Society, Francis Goodhue, Lemuel Whitney and Eli Sargeant, sold "at public vendue" for $40 pew or slip No. 12 in the gallery to Asa Pratt and Jacob Hadley, their heirs and assigns.

As early as 1836 an article was inserted in the warrant for the society meeting to see if the society would take measures to enlarge the meeting-house or build a new one, but the article was dismissed. For five years no further official action in the matter was taken, but in the meeting of February 23, 1841, the question came up again and an investigating committee was chosen, which reported on the eighth of March and a committee was chosen to secure subscriptions for building a new house of worship. The decisive meeting came February 23, 1842, when it was voted unanimously to move the meeting-house and enlarge it. The site chosen, which is the present site, was the "orchard," so-called, "north of the Brattleboro Bank." This bank stood north of the brick building which is the home of Deacon George H. Clapp. The removal could not be

accomplished without a vote of the pew owners independently of the society, because the pews were their individual property, but the pew owners were all of one accord. “Upon the suggestion of gentlemen over West river” it was agreed that the horse sheds attached to the meeting-house be considered a part and parcel of the house and be moved by the committee.

Apparently the building was not moved intact, but was taken down and set up again, as at this same meeting a committee was chosen to “superintend the taking down of the house and setting it upon a suitable foundation,” and in *The Vermont Phoenix* of April 22, 1842, we find this item of news: “Rev. Chs. Walker's Society in this village are about taking down their Church on the Common, to re-model and to locate it on Main Street, directly North of the Bank.” One week after it was finally decided to move, it was voted in the Elliot Street chapel to lengthen the house so as to admit twelve new pews on the lower floor. The last meeting in the church before removal was held March 2, when it was voted to adopt a drawing by Virgil Woodcock of Swanzey, N. H., covering the proposed enlargement and a steeple; to investigate the cost of warming the new house by furnaces; and to move the sheds belonging to persons out of the village, but not to those in the village.

The committee of the society to take down the church and set it up again consisted of Col. Joseph Goodhue, Ferdinand Tyler, Esq., Lovell Farr, Esq., George Sargeant and Col. Calvin Townsley.

The deed of the land, dated June 13, 1842, is from Mary Goodhue, Joseph Goodhue and Wells Goodhue, and the consideration named is $500. “So long as the said tract of land shall be used for that purpose and no longer,” is the way the deed reads, and it requires that in case the church is destroyed from any cause it shall be rebuilt within two years.

The society met in its new meeting-house January 5, 1843, at 9 a.m. It was a momentous meeting, with both forenoon and afternoon sessions, as twenty articles

of business were transacted, including the adoption of additional by-laws and the adoption of a basis of settlement with pew owners, who had to bear the expense of moving the church.

The enlarged edifice was dedicated on Wednesday, January 11, 1843, and in the church records for that day is the first mention of the name, the Centre Church. The record says: “The new house of public worship called the ‘Centre Church’ was this day solemnly dedicated to the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The sermon was preached by Rev. Z. S. Barstow of Keene, N. H., the dedicatory prayer by the Rev. Mr. Foster of Putney, concluding prayer by Rev. Mr. Barbour of Dummerston. The singing was appropriate under the direction of Mr. F. Holbrook. A large concourse of people were present and appeared much interested in the services on the occasion.”

The plan of the rebuilt church was somewhat as before, but it was longer and instead of having circular seats for the singers the singers' seats extended entirely across the west or Main Street end, on the second floor. The pews were high and straight, the side rows joining the walls, and there were aisles between the side pews and middle pews. There was no middle aisle. There were six pews on each side of the pulpit, at right angles to the other floor pews. The gallery arrangement was similar to that of today, and the church was heated by hot-air furnace. Chimneys projected into the church, one each on the north and south sides, just beyond the present fourth windows from the pulpit. The foundations of these chimneys still remain in their original positions in the basement, and the place where the new plastering was joined to the old when the chimneys were removed is still plainly visible. These projecting chimneys necessitated a short pew in the back row in both galleries, in order that the people might get past the chimneys, and these short pews are still in position in the galleries. The pulpit was much higher than now. The steeple rose from the roof and in front was a row of pillars as before. In the rear a row of horse sheds

extended across the land now occupied by the chapel and parlors.

Doubts arose this same year, 1843, as to whether the society was so organized that it could hold the legal title to the real estate, so further association was effected under Chapter 81 of the Revised Statutes of the state, at which time it was declared that the religious instruction in this house should ever after be of the Calvinistic doctrine as then understood and taught in the society, but this doctrine as then understood ceased, long since, to be preached in this church.

Rev. Mr. Walker continued as pastor eleven years, being dismissed by a mutual council February 14, 1846. Under his teaching the church was built up and strengthened and the additions to the membership were 146. He died in Pittsford, Vt., November 28, 1870, at the age of eighty years.

For nearly a quarter of a century after the Centre Church was organized the person dominant in its affairs was Deacon John Holbrook. His death took place on Fast Day, April 6, 1838, during Rev. Mr. Walker's pastorate. In the church record it is written of him: “The Lord has seen best in His holy will and pleasure, this day to remove a valuable disciple from His church on earth to His immediate presence in heaven. John Holbrook, who had sustained the office of deacon in this church from the time of its organization in 1816 to the present day and had watched over its interests with parental care, had witnessed its increase from a little company of 14 to 300 members, has gone to receive the rewards promised to those who have been faithful in their Master's service. That hope that had sustained him in life was his support in death. When near the border of the grave, a friend to comfort him recounted the many good deeds he had done. He immediately replied: ‘Did I not put my trust in the atonement made by Christ I should have no hope.’ Thus departed this servant of Christ, rejoicing, as he had long lived, in the Lord. May this death be sanctified to this church,

may its members imitate their deceased brother, so far as he followed Christ."

From the time of Rev. Mr. Walker's dismissal in February, 1846, until October, individuals supplied the pulpit, principally Rev. I. L. Merrick, formerly an American Board missionary. Five months earlier, in May, the society called A. Huntington Clapp of Boston, then a professor in Middlebury College, a graduate of Yale University and Andover Theological Seminary. He was ordained and installed October 14. Rev. Mr. Clapp gave great satisfaction and continued as pastor exactly seven years, or until October 14, 1853, although since January 1 of that year he had been obliged to relinquish active duties on account of failing sight. During his absence Rev. J. Hull acted as pastor. Rev. Mr. Clapp received into the church 102 members. He died in New York City, April 27, 1899, at the age of eighty years.

Rev. Dr. George P. Tyler of Lowville, N. Y., was next called. He was a native of Brattleboro, a son of Royall and Mary (Palmer) Tyler, a graduate of Yale University and Union Theological Seminary, New York, who united with this church before leaving for college.

To him belongs the distinction of being the only person reared in this church who subsequently served it as its minister. He began his labors here Friday, November 4, 1853, with a preparatory lecture for communion, and preached his first sermon the following Sunday. A mutual council dismissed Rev. Mr. Clapp November 15 and installed Rev. Mr. Tyler the following day, Rev. Charles Walker and Rev. Mr. Clapp, two former pastors, participating in the installation services.

The next year, 1854, a committee consisting of N. B. Williston, S. M. Waite and George H. Salisbury was elected by the society to sell the chapel on Elliot Street and erect a new one in the rear of the church at an expense to be limited to $150 above the receipts from the sale of the old chapel. The new chapel was what is now the ladies' parlors, and as it necessitated the removal of the north section of horse sheds the men who

owned them hitched their horses in the basement of the chapel. There had to be an entrance to the chapel, and as the land running back from Main Street was on a downward incline a board walk was built on the south side of the church, the timbers supporting the walk being morticed to the baseboard. The mortice holes have been filled, but their outline is plainly visible today.

One of the most important developments in our church life occurred in Rev. Mr. Tyler's pastorate. It was the sale of 78 2-3 pews to the society by the owners for $1 each in 1863. This enabled many persons, not only then but also in succeeding years, to give to the support of the church money which they otherwise would have had to pay pew owners for sittings.

Another important change in the outward appearance of the church took place while Rev. Mr. Tyler was pastor. About 5 o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, July 11, 1864, a tempest of rain, hail and wind, which *The Vermont Phoenix* of the following Friday said was the severest remembered by the oldest inhabitants, swept down from the northwest and blew off the steeple down to the clock. It fell on the south side, between the church and the little bank building. The timbers in the steeple were found to be very rotten.

Previous to this time there had been talk of making extensive repairs, and the tornado emphasized the necessity and crystallized sentiment. The changes made left the exterior appearance of our church as we see it today, except the south part of the chapel and with the possible exception of the color, for the painting of the church white in the past few days is not the first time that that has been done. The pillars were removed, the audience room extended so as to provide twenty-six more pews and a new steeple built up from a stone foundation on the ground.

Rev. Mr. Tyler's pastorate continued until January 28, 1867, when he was dismissed by mutual council. In the thirteen years there were received into the church 197 members. He died in Lansingburg, N. Y., January 17, 1896, at the age of eighty-six years.

For a few months after Rev. Mr. Tyler was dismissed different ministers supplied the pulpit, the last of whom was Rev. Nathaniel Mighill of East Cambridge, Mass., a graduate of Amherst College and Union and Andover Theological Seminaries, who had been settled in his first parish, in East Cambridge, two years. After preaching a few Sundays he was called to the pastorate and was installed October 3, 1867. He was but twenty-seven years old and his sermons dwelt less upon the certainty of punishment for transgressors than those to which the people had been accustomed, and sounded rather the keynote of love, for which he came to be styled “the apostle John.” The society placed his salary at more than twice what it had paid any previous minister, and there were larger expenditures in other ways, including $600 for music. Early in his pastorate, in 1869, he brought about the first districting of the parish so that newcomers not having other denominational affiliations might be made to feel “at the earliest practicable time and in the most thorough possible way that they are among brethren and sisters.”

The need of larger quarters for a vestry also was felt and in 1871, on motion of D. B. Thompson, father of the late Henry H. Thompson, the trustees were instructed to ascertain the feasibility of putting a vestry under the church, also to find what the bank building and site could be bought for and to estimate the cost of a new chapel and the cost of extending the then present chapel. The plan finally adopted, in 1873, on motion of Charles F. Thompson, was to buy the bank property, clear away the remaining horse sheds and extend the chapel by building what is now the south wing. The dirt removed in excavating for the chapel extension was used in filling in in front of the chapel, which did away with the necessity for the outside board walk from the street. The Methodist chapel was used by the Congregationalists during these changes. The expense of these improvements was about $12,000. The basement of the chapel and parlors continued to be used as horse sheds as long as Dr. D. P. Dearborn owned the land north of

the church and permitted the use of the driveway. The old barn door on the north side is still doing service.

Rev. Mr. Mighill's pastorate closed August 31, 1875, when he was dismissed by a mutual council. He went to the Old South Church in Worcester, Mass., which last week celebrated its 200th anniversary. During his Brattleboro ministry 174 were added to the church roll. He died in Grantville, Mass., February 3, 1878, at the age of thirty-eight years.

The successor to Rev. Mr. Mighill was Rev. Dr. George Leon Walker, who had recently been pastor of the First Church, New Haven, Conn., son of a former pastor. Dr. Walker returned to his boyhood home as acting pastor in October, 1875, and remained in that capacity until January 1, 1878, a little more than two years. He was a man of rare spiritual power and intellectual endowments, and a forceful and convincing preacher. He became pastor of the First Church in Hartford, Conn., upon which city he left a deep impress, and became a recognized leader in Congregational affairs. He always retained his interest in Brattleboro and spent the summers here. His death occurred in Hartford, March 14, 1900, at the age of sixty-nine years.

Our next pastor was Rev. George E. Martin of New Haven, Conn., his first pastorate being with this church. He was asked to supply one year from July 1, 1878, and on July 9, 1879, he was ordained and installed. It was during his pastorate that the Ladies' Benevolent Sewing Society of the Centre Church, of which Mrs. Sarah B. Harris was president, bought, in 1882, the Steere & Turner pipe organ now in use, for $2,800. It was built from specifications drawn by Dr. Martin. Just before he came the choir seats over the church entrance were given up and the music was rendered from the opposite end of the church, in accordance with more modern ideas. The church was blessed in many ways during Rev. Dr. Martin's pastorate of over five years in a crucial period of its history. Dr. Martin was dismissed by a mutual council, September 6, 1883,

and went to the First Church in Brockton, Mass. Later he ministered to some of the leading churches in the country, being a man of brilliant attainments. His home is now in Auburndale, Mass.

Rev. Samuel H. Lee of Oberlin, Ohio, who had been a professor in Oberlin College, came to the pulpit soon after Rev. Dr. Martin left, and remained as a supply two years. He was a graduate of Yale and of Yale Divinity School. He resigned December 29, 1884, but continued to supply the greater part of the following year and the church went forward under his leadership. Rev. Mr. Lee was called to the American International College in Springfield, Mass., in 1900. He resigned the presidency in 1908, but has continued to reside in Springfield.

On December 16, 1885, Rev. Charles Orrin Day, a graduate of Yale and Andover, who had been pastor of the church in Williamsburg, Mass., was installed as pastor of this church, and the sermon was preached by President L. Clark Seelye of Smith College, Northampton, Mass. His pastorate, which was the longest in the history of the church with the exception of that of Rev. Mr. McGee, stands out vividly in the memory of most of us. He was loved by the whole community, and his influence for righteousness was a force in our community life. He was made chaplain of the Vermont regiment of militia in February, 1895, and was with the regiment in that capacity in the Spanish-American War in 1898. He resigned in August of that year and was dismissed by a mutual council September 22, following. In February, 1899, he became corresponding secretary of the Congregational Education Society and in 1901 became president of Andover Theological Seminary, resigning in 1908, the year before the seminary was removed to Cambridge. In 1909 he went to Labrador with Dr. W. T. Grenfell, returning that winter, and died in the home of his daughter in Andover, Mass., April 5, 1910, at the age of fifty-eight years.

It was in the pastorate of Rev. Mr. Day that the last of the important changes in the interior of the church

building were made. These changes were in charge of a committee chosen July 1, 1888, of which Broughton D. Harris was chairman. The committee estimated that the expenses of various improvements in the church and parsonage would be $5,750, and were authorized to raise that amount, but in a meeting on May 2 Mr. Harris reported that the society found itself in the predicament of the general government, that they were embarrassed by a surplus, the subscriptions, including $2,000 from the Ladies' Benevolent Society, amounting to $7,700. It was then decided to put in new pews of the circular design, which was done, the arrangement being as it is today, with a broad center aisle and two side aisles, next to the walls. It was decided also to place a double glass window in the tower, over the main entrance, in memory of Mrs. Sarah Goodhue Chapin. She was born into the church, so to speak, of a family that has always been among the stanchest and most liberal supporters of the church.

Besides the new pews the changes included a new church roof, new decorations, new gas fixtures, new windows, the removal of the projecting chimneys, the lowering of the pulpit eight or nine inches, which also was moved back a little, new exterior paint and various minor improvements. One of the chimneys was moved to the northwest corner and the other to the north of the pulpit, where it does duty as a chimney and ventilating shaft, a shaft of tile being enclosed within the bricks. The pulpit furniture remained the same, but a new black walnut communion table was given in memory of Harriet G. Holbrook by her children, which is now in use. The new windows all were of cathedral glass. The two small ones in the vestibule were given by the Sunday school and others were given by relatives in memory of Deacon N. B. Williston, Sarah Edwards Goodhue, Deacon Charles B. Rice, Joseph Steen and Ethel Steen Flint, William, Mary and Julia Cune, Hannibal Hadley, and Mr. and Mrs. A. Van Doorn.

The expenses of the alterations footed up a little more than $10,000, and while the work was in progress the

church services were held in the town hall. The committee consisted of Broughton D. Harris, Newton I. Hawley, Charles F. Thompson, George C. Averill and Jerry E. Haywood.

The rededication services took place the evening of August 30, 1888, and the church was filled to overflowing. Rev. Dr. George Leon Walker preached the sermon on "The Glory of the Sanctuary," and Rev. Dr. A. Huntington Clapp gave the address to the people. This was forty-two years after Dr. Clapp came here to take up his first pastoral charge.

For several months after Rev. Dr. Day was dismissed the pulpit was supplied, and on June 1, 1899, Rev. Harry R. Miles came from the Windsor Avenue Church of Hartford, Conn., to be our pastor. He was a graduate of Harvard, and of Yale Divinity School, and had taken special study in Germany and served as assistant to Dr. T. T. Munger in New Haven. He was one of the best known of the younger generation of ministers in New England. He was installed June 29, 1899. Besides making large additions to the church membership, Rev. Mr. Miles rendered efficient service to several important local institutions and represented the state organization twice in national conventions and once in an international council in Edinburgh in 1908. He was dismissed by a mutual council October 12, 1908, after having served this church over nine and a half years, and the pastoral relations ceased November 23. He went to the First Church in Berkeley, Calif., and is now pastor of Dwight Place Church in New Haven, Conn. Just before he came here the society voted to build a new parsonage, which was done during the first of his pastorate, at an expense of about $5,300, including $1,500 received from Edwin H. Chase for a part of the parsonage lot, on the south side. Sumner B. Emerson was chosen chairman of the building committee.

Succeeding Rev. Mr. Miles, after a brief interval, Rev. Roy M. Houghton of Derby, Conn., a graduate of Olivet College and Yale Divinity School, took up the duties of the pastorate January 1, 1909. His pastorate

of seven years was marked by several important developments, besides the addition of 371 members to the church roll. After some agitation as to the need of more room for the Sunday school, a committee, of which Judge James M. Tyler was chairman, was elected by the society to investigate the matter. The result was that an option was secured on the Col. Francis Goodhue property, the second house and lot north of the church, for $15,000; that on December 12, 1913, by vote of the society, the trustees named a committee to raise subscriptions, of which Francis E. Perry was chairman; that seventeen days later the committee reported subscriptions of more than $20,000, including $5,000 from Mr. and Mrs. George L. Dunham, pledged earlier on condition that $20,000 be raised; and that forthwith the Goodhue property was bought of Mrs. Henry Van Kleeck of Denver, Col., and Francis Goodhue, Jr., of Germantown, Pa., daughter and son of the late Col. Francis and Mary (Brooks) Goodhue, and was named the Centre Church House, now used largely for Sunday school purposes. From the beginning the Goodhue family has been closely identified with the life of this church, six generations attending its services.

In 1914 the number of deacons was increased from four to six. Early in January, 1915, the every-member canvass for benevolences was adopted, and on January 12 of the same year the church and society were consolidated and incorporated under the name of Centre Congregational Church, doing away with a double form of government, although the society has not yet been formally dissolved. Officers were elected under the new order of things January 22, 1915. On December 10, 1915, it was voted that the pews be free for all, and the every-member canvass system was adopted for both benevolences and expenses and was put into effect in January of this year with gratifying results. Rev. Mr. Houghton resigned December 5, 1915, the resignation taking effect February 1, 1916, and he has since been pastor of the Church of the Redeemer in New Haven, Conn.

The church extended a call on February 25, 1916, to Rev. Richard Harold Clapp of the First Church of Farmington, Me., a Boston University man who graduated from Andover Theological Seminary when Rev. Dr. Charles O. Day was its president. Rev. Mr. Clapp took up the work Sunday, April 2. He has already shown himself to be a man of great spiritual force, and we believe that under his guidance a still greater measure of blessing will come to us.

Women's Organizations

The first organization of the women in this church was the Female Friendly Association, though a Ladies' Praying Circle is mentioned earlier than this, of which no record was kept. The Female Friendly Association consisted of “church members only, or those who expect soon to become such,” according to their constitution, adopted in November, 1816. The Female Fund Society, which furnished $400 toward the first parsonage, previously has been referred to.

Out of the Female Friendly Association grew the Maternal Association, which had its own constitution adopted Thursday, April 3, 1834. This continued without interruption until 1846, when the Ladies' Sewing Society came into existence, which continued under that name until 1890. It was this society that raised the money for the organ. The Maternal Association was revived as a part of the Sewing Society from 1861 until 1863, when no further record appears. The Ladies' Association was organized in its present form February 26, 1890, under the direction of Rev. Charles O. Day, and the constitution was adopted on March 4 of the same year. This was revised in 1910 and again in 1914, and the name changed to Woman's Association of the Centre Congregational Church. Every woman in the parish is a member of the Association. For the third time in the century mothers' meetings were held

from 1901 to 1906. Missionary work, both home and foreign, has always had a prominent place in the women's work from the beginning.

The early members of the society were a remarkable circle of women, not only for their culture and piety, but for their ability to accomplish things.

"They did their work, and then they passed away,
An unknown band,
And took their places with the greater host
In the higher land."

The ministers' wives are remembered as women of rare character. Resolutions of appreciation of the life and work of Mrs. George P. Tyler in this community were passed and are on our church records.

A quiet and unassuming woman was Mrs. Nathaniel Mighill, who was always doing good to everyone as she had opportunity. It is remembered of her that she took a loaf of brown bread one Sunday morning to two poor but proud old ladies who lived near the parsonage, telling them that Mr. Mighill was especially fond of it for his Sunday morning breakfast. Meeting them a few days afterward, one of them said: "You never need bring us any more of that bread. We are not accustomed to eating such bread, and we don't wonder at Mr. Mighill's not preaching any better sermons if *that* is what you give him for breakfast Sunday morning." Fortunately Mrs. Mighill's sense of humor enabled her to see the remark in its true light.

Time forbids our singling out the women who deserve to be mentioned, for they are many, and their faithful services to this church will never be forgotten.

Sunday School

For a short time previous to May, 1815, Miss Hannah Wells, daughter of Rev. William Wells, and a true missionary spirit for the whole region, had brought together a Bible class of young ladies which grew to such pro-

The Old-Time Sunday School

portions that she was obliged to call upon others to help her, and four ladies were appointed by the praying circle, beginning their labors on Sunday, May 7, 1815. Under their care the school continued until Friday, July 5, 1816, when twelve ladies and two gentlemen came from the church at West Brattleboro and opened a school at the schoolhouse on the village common, boys and young men being admitted.

On May 4, 1817, the ladies found that they had twenty-seven boys, so they divided them into three classes of nine each, with Deacon Anson Barber, Al C. Putnam and Joseph Steen as teachers. The organization took place May 5, 1822, as near as can be ascertained, with Deacon David Wood as superintendent. Uniform lessons were adopted, the books used being Vol. I. of the Union Questions.

Sunday school concerts were commenced about 1825, the first plan being a concert of prayer for the Sunday school work, held every month, but in the course of ten years they developed in another direction, the members of the school reciting verses or passages of scripture. They continued in this form for many years. Mrs. C. B. Rice, of beloved memory, and Miss Rebecca Crosby each committed to memory 2,000 verses and were presented with Bibles as prizes for their perseverance.

Some of the older people may recall the occasion, at one of the concerts, in the height of a political campaign, when the son of a prominent politician startled the congregation by reciting the following verse, in stentorian tones: “If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the Republicans the same?”

These later took the form of missionary concerts and gradually occurred with less frequency until they were held simply at Easter, Children's Day and Christmas, especially for the children.

The membership of the school has doubled since 1825. At that time it was the only school in town. The grading of our school was begun during the pastorate of Rev. H. R. Miles and carried to completion under Rev.

R. M. Houghton. It is interesting to contrast the first uniform lessons with the variety of study that is taken up on any Sunday in the different grades today.

Other Organizations

An organization that added greatly to the social life of our church for a number of years was the Fortnightly Club, organized in Mr. Day's pastorate. The meetings were of literary character, with occasional dramatic efforts that will long be remembered.

A flourishing Christian Endeavor Society was carried on a quarter of a century ago, in which many of the workers of today received their training.

Another society that contributed to our church life and the training of our young women for church service was the Fessenden Helping Hand Society. This also was organized by Rev. Mr. Day at the instigation of Gen. Armstrong of Hampton Institute, for the purpose of supporting a scholarship at that institution. It was more than a decade that this society carried on its work, raising more than $2,000 for Hampton, Fisk University and other missionary work.

These three societies have passed out of existence and others have taken their places, but it is pleasant to think of those who worked faithfully for them, many of them no longer with us, but the training we received with them is felt in the church today.

This has been a missionary church, meeting and often exceeding its apportionment, and last year our benevolences were in excess of $3,000. We feel that in proportion as we have given have we received the blessings of God and the larger vision of life.

Our invested funds are the John Holbrook Fund of $1,000 for current expenses; the Sarah Holbrook Fund of $3,000 for parsonage maintenance; the Sarah Good-

hue Chapin Fund of $2,000 for Sunday school library and $5,000 for the needy of the church; the William P. Cune Fund of $1,000 for the Sunday school; the Mary Ann Goodhue Cune Fund of $1,000 for the support of preaching; and the Susan B. Salisbury Fund of $200 for the needy of the church, making a total of $13,200.

I am more conscious than are you of the shortcomings of this paper. Many of our church activities and many phases of our church life it has not even touched upon. It has been extremely interesting in going over the records to note the constant transferring of responsibility as new persons come in to take up the burden when others lay it down. I should like to dwell longer upon the personalities which have made this church what it is—to speak, for instance, of Mrs. Mary Field Hadley, our oldest member, who will reach the century mark October 15, and who united with this church May 6, 1838; of the late Deacon Charles F. Thompson, who was a corporate member of the American Board and who raised more money for church work by thousands of dollars than any other man ever connected with our church; of the late United States Judge Hoyt H. Wheeler, who was a generous supporter and one of the most constant attendants upon the Sunday services of this church; of the late Stephen W. Kimball, who served the church in the capacity of clerk for just a quarter of a century; of the late Town Clerk William S. Newton, who came to Christ in the sunset of his ripe old age; and of many others who deserve to be mentioned in a review of our church life. I should like to mention the sermon preached by Rev. William Wells at the first communion, July 7, 1816, which I have recently read. I should like to mention also the seventeen men born in Brattleboro who entered either the Congregational or Presbyterian ministry, but I already have trespassed too much upon the privileges of this occasion.

Ours has been a notable history, and may the Master of Men sanctify it to our good.